

ABRAHAM LINCOLN
THE MAN AND THE CRISIS


WILMOT D. MITCHELL

MITCHELL

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THE MAN AND THE CRISIS

There is a serene Providence which rules the fate of nations, which makes little account of time, little of one generation or race, makes no account of disasters, conquers alike by what is called defeat or by what is called victory, thrusts aside enemy and obstruction, crushes everything immoral as inhuman and obtains the ultimate triumph of the best race by the sacrifice of everything which resists the moral laws of the world. It makes its own instruments, creates the man for the time, trains him in poverty, inspires his genius, and arms him for the task.

EMERSON.



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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THE MAN AND THE CRISIS

BY

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A FOREWORD

THE basis of this little book is a centenary address given by the author at Bowdoin College, February 12, 1909, and at Augusta, Maine, on the same day, at a Lincoln celebration by the State Legislature. The author makes no claim to original investigation. He has gathered the facts chiefly from the many different biographies of Lincoln; has sought, amid the conflicting statements that cluster around the life of this great man, to discriminate between the true and the false; and either in the text or the appended references has cited the important sources of his information, and has endeavored to give credit where credit is due.

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*This man whose homely face you look upon,
Was one of nature's masterful, great men ;
Born with strong arms, that unfought battles won ;
Direct of speech, and cunning with the pen.
Chosen for large designs, he had the art
Of winning with his humor, and he went
Straight to his mark, which was the human heart ;
Wise, too, for what he could not break he bent.
Upon his back a more than Atlas-load,
The burden of the Commonwealth, was laid ;
He stooped, and rose up to it, though the road
Shot suddenly downwards, not a whit dismayed.
Hold, warriors, councillors, kings ! All now give place
To this dear benefactor of the race.¹*

¹ From *The Poetical Writings of Richard Henry Stoddard* ;
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*When the Norn-Mother saw the Whirlwind Hour,
Greatening and darkening as it hurried on,
She bent the strenuous Heavens and came down,
To make a man to meet the mortal need.*

MARKHAM.

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ON the morning of Monday, February 11, 1861, in front of "the dingy little railroad station" in Springfield, Illinois, there clustered eagerly around a train a throng of a thousand people or more. Just as the train was about to start and the conductor already had his hand upon the bell-rope to give the signal, there appeared upon the rear platform a tall, dark-complexioned man with unruly hair and a scraggly beard of a few months' growth, who "raised his hand to command attention." At once the head of every man in that throng was bared to the falling snow-flakes,¹ as Abraham Lincoln spoke these "chaste and pathetic" words to his old friends and neighbors who had come to bid him Godspeed :

"My Friends :— No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which

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rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

At the close of these words, the last that those friends and neighbors were ever to hear from his lips, the train rolled out, and the President-elect had gone forth to meet his great task.

And it was indeed a task "greater than that which rested upon Washington." He was to be "no holiday magistrate, no fair-weather sailor." He was, as Emerson says, "the new pilot hurried to the helm in a tornado."¹ The long, bitter struggle between the North and the South over the extension of slavery was at the crisis. The Union was breaking up. Already seven large states had seceded and others were but hesitating. Even while Mr. Lincoln was making this memorable journey, delegates from six of the seceding states were assembled at Montgomery, Alabama, to establish a provisional government under the title of "The Confederate States of America." Through the slavery cabal of Southern Senators and Representatives at Washington, through the treachery of President Buchanan's cabinet, three members of which had openly or secretly abetted the insurrection,² through the weakness and vacillation of President Buchanan

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himself, the treasury was depleted, the public credit was shattered, northern arsenals were but poorly equipped, and much Federal property — harbor forts, a navy-yard, mints, arsenals, custom-houses, and revenue cutters — was now held firm within the clutch of the conspirators. European governments, too, were watching the conflict closely and but half concealed their desire to have the Union torn asunder. England and France seemed only to be waiting for a pretext before they recognized the Confederacy.

Moreover the Government was menaced by the widespread demoralization of its friends. Fear, folly, and factional differences were rife among them. In the last part of October, 1860, General Scott, at the head of the army, had suggested to the President that the country be divided into four separate confederacies and even named some of their possible boundaries.¹ Now the Democratic papers of the North were advocating peace at any price. Horace Greeley, through his influential *New York Tribune*, was declaring that if the Cotton States "choose to form an independent nation, they have a clear moral right to do so" and if "the great body of the Southern people" desire "to escape from the Union, we will do our best to forward their views."² Even men like Governor Seward, when face to face with threatening rebellion, became weak-kneed and seemed eager to grant almost any concession to conciliate the South. And besides this there was the insistent demand of the New England Abolitionists that slavery be destroyed whether

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the Union were preserved or not. Amid all this Babel of voices, this confusion of opinions and motives and forces, of personal ambitions and partisan prejudices and misguided patriotism, of sectional bitterness and racial hate, there was dire necessity for a calm, clear brain, an unyielding will, and an honest heart. Was the President-elect equal to the task? Could he save the Union?

“Upon his back a more than Atlas-load,
The burden of the Commonwealth, was laid.”¹

“What manner of man is this that has come out of the West?” the East was asking fearfully. “Alas, have the Republicans acted wisely in setting aside the tried and able and urbane Chase and the rich and cultured and experienced Seward for this unknown, inexperienced, uncouth frontier lawyer?” Many in fear and despair answered “No.” Even while he was on his way to Washington, disturbing reports came to those who would be his friends. In his desire not to commit himself too firmly to any policy until he knew the facts more thoroughly, he tried to reassure the people at Columbus, Ohio, by telling them, so it was reported, that “Nothing is going wrong” and the eastern papers shouted “Simple Susan.”² At Westfield, New York, with much ado he lifted up in his long arms, and kissed before the applauding crowd, the little girl who had written him a few months before that he would improve his looks by growing a beard, and whose advice he had at once followed.³ At Harrisburg he suddenly disappeared from the hotel and as

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mysteriously appeared the next morning in Washington. His opponents chuckled derisively; and many of his friends were chagrined that his trip had ended so unceremoniously. Was he a trifler, a buffoon, a coward? The Democratic papers referred to him contemptuously as "The Illinois Lawyer," and in the South such papers as the *Richmond Examiner*, with malicious virulence, called him "Lincoln the Beast," "The Nigger," "The Illinois Ape."¹ What were the facts? What of the man, his birth, his breeding, his preparation for this Herculean task?

His biography has been writ large. Every nook and cranny of his life has been searched with microscopic eye. Nothing has been too trivial to be of interest if it concerned him. We have, therefore, to-day a large body of literature, of poems and novels, of anecdotes and essays, of histories and biographies and even dramas, founded upon the acts and personality of this man.

The scene and circumstances of his birth on February 12, 1809, were far from pleasant and promising. The little one-roomed log cabin in which he was born on the Big South Fork of Nolin Creek, in the woods of Kentucky, was of the rudest sort,—fourteen feet square, without floor or windows, and containing only the barest necessities. To this home Thomas Lincoln had brought his wife Nancy and their infant daughter Sarah some two years before; and here from the woods and from the soil that was thin and unproductive they were able to wrest but a scanty living.

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As to just how much Lincoln was indebted to his ancestry authorities differ. "I don't know who my grandfather was and am much more concerned to know what his grandson will be" Lincoln used to say in later days. Many biographers tell us that his father, Thomas Lincoln, was a thriftless, shiftless, vagrant ne'er-do-well, similar to the "poor-white trash," the "low-flung people" of the South;¹ while others maintain that the conditions in which he lived were those of all pioneers of his day and that it was the spirit of adventure which he had inherited from his fathers and his desire to improve his condition that made him so often abandon one farm for another and push out upon the frontier.² At all odds we know that he was at ten "a wandering, laboring boy" and that "he grew up literally without education."³ We are also told that at twenty-five he was a carpenter of some skill, owned a small farm, and had the "reputation of being good-natured, and obliging, and possessing what his neighbors called 'good, strong horse sense.'"⁴ He was also, from his point of view, a moral, indeed a religious man. One biographer mentions the facts that he was appointed a road surveyor in 1816, possessed a Bible, a very expensive book at that time, and that he once purchased on credit a pair of silk suspenders worth one dollar and a half.

It seems likely that Lincoln's garrulous cousin, Denis Hanks, came near the truth when he said, "Tom was strong, an' he wasn't lazy nor afeerd o' nothin', but he was kind o' shif'less — couldn't git nothin'

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ahead, an' didn't keer putickalar. Lots o' them kind o' fellers in arly days, 'druther hunt an' fish, an' I reckon they had their use. They killed off the varmints an' made it safe fur other fellers to go into the woods with an ax. . . Tom thought a heap o' Nancy, an' he was as good to her as he knowed how. He didn't drink or swear or play cyards or fight, an' them was drinkin', cussin', quarrelsome days. Tom was popylar, an' he could lick a bully if he had to. He jist couldn't git ahead, somehow." 1

But what some may think a more important fact is that behind Thomas Lincoln there was a long line of energetic, thrifty, and intelligent ancestors, many of whom were Quakers. The first of his family in this country came from Norfolk, England, to Hingham, Massachusetts, in 1637, and it is of interest to New Englanders to know that to this family belonged Honorable Levi Lincoln, Attorney-General of the United States, also his two distinguished sons, Levi, who was nine times Governor of Massachusetts, and Enoch, who was three times Governor of Maine.

The ancestry of Nancy Hanks is shrouded in mystery, but we know that Lincoln cherished her memory fondly. He once exclaimed: "God bless my mother; all that I am or ever hope to be I owe to her." 2 At the time of Lincoln's birth she was twenty-six, frail but handsome, with dark brown hair, gray eyes, and refined features. Unlike the slow-going Thomas, whom she taught to write his name, she was by nature intellectual, with retentive memory and good judgment, of

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delicate instincts, humorous at times, but often melancholy, desiring, and dreaming of, a life less rough than that of the frontier, to which she was by nature ill suited. "Nancy," says Dennis Hanks, "was purty as a pictur an' smart as you'd find 'em anywhere. She was turrible ashamed o' the way they lived, but she knowed Tom was doin' his best, an' she wasn't of the pesterin' kind."

It was with such parents, in a rough pioneer home, under the grinding restrictions of poverty, that the boy grew up. His father, who had a mania for moving, first exchanged his farm for one fifteen miles away on Knob Creek, and a few years later, having traded his farm and cabin for ten barrels of whiskey and twenty dollars in cash, he transported his household goods over the Ohio and into the wilderness of Indiana. The boy's only acquaintances, during this time, outside of his own home, were settlers, coarse-grained, illiterate, and superstitious, almost the only elevating influence to touch his life, the love of a gentle mother. And before he was ten, death had taken his mother from him. Within a year, however, his father brought another wife into the home. Fortunately her influence was for good. She sympathized with young Abe in his desire to read, write, and cipher, and helped him in every way possible.

The story of that boy as he grew to manhood is now a household legend cherished in every American home: a chore boy; at seventeen, "a terribly muscular clod-hopper," as Schurz says, "six feet four in his stock-

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ings, if he had any, given to fits of abstraction and to strange spells of melancholy from which he would often pass in a moment to rollicking outbursts of droll humor ;” a rail splitter ; a farm hand “ practising polemics ” from a stump in the hay-field ; a clerk in the store of Denton Offut at New Salem, Illinois, so honest that when one day making change he took six cents overmuch from a customer, he could not go to bed until that evening after his day’s work, he had walked three miles to pay back the money ; a champion wrestler, able to put the most sinewy of the Clarey’s Grove Gang upon his back ; a story-teller enchanting the village with his droll tales ; a captain in the Black Hawk War ; a member of the unlucky firm of Berry and Lincoln, the latter of whom sprawled on his store counter, or on the grass in the orchard, “ with his bare feet up a tree ” and read Blackstone, while his “ dissolute partner drank whiskey ;”¹ a bankrupt whose store had “ winked out ” and left him with the “ national debt,” as he called it, of \$1100 on his hands ; a postmaster carrying the mail around in his hat ; a deputy-surveyor ; an almost desperate lover grieving for Ann Rutledge ; a candidate for the Legislature and not a very promising one either, we should say, “ in a mixed jeans coat, clawhammer style, short in the sleeves and bobtailed, flax-and-tow-linen pantaloons, a straw hat and potmetal boots,”² a wardrobe hardly up even to the Sangamon County standard. But fortunately the good people of his county, we remember, knew that clothes do not make the man, and they soon discovered that he was,

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as they said, "a perfect take-in ; he knew more than all of the other candidates put together." ¹

Of his experiences as a legislator ; of his triumphs during his twenty-five years' practice at the Illinois bar ; of his famous speech at the Springfield Convention, when, as he put it, willing to "go down linked to the truth in the advocacy of what" was "just and right," ² he said : "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved ; I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided ;" of his love-making conquests, in which as a lank, uncouth barrister he got the better of the polished, gallant Stephen Douglas and thereby won the hand of Mary Todd ; of his more famous victory in debate over the Little Giant, when, with his sharp-pointed questions concerning slavery and states-rights, he pierced the armor of his opponent and unfitted Douglas for the presidency ; or of that speech of which it is said, ³ "lifting himself to his full height, he reached his hands towards the stars of the still night and there fell from his lips one of the most sublime expressions of American statesmanship : 'In the right to eat the bread his own hands have earned, the negro is the equal of Judge Douglas or any other living man ;' " and of his nomination, and election to the presidency, I need not here speak in detail. It is enough to say that in all these we find the same man, shrewd, sturdy, unconventional, sympathetic, always eager to play fair, with a keen sense of humor, but with a

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deep undertone of melancholy that does not allow us to forget that mother buried in the little forest clearing.

Such in brief was the Atlantean task and such were the birth and the breeding of the man whom the people had called to it. Was the voice of the people the voice of God? I believe it was. In heart and mind, by birth and breeding, Abraham Lincoln was peculiarly fitted to deal with that awful crisis in American history. Although he had served but one term in the national councils, and that many years before, he comprehended the problem of slavery and the Union as a national problem, understood its significance for all sections of the country, as thoroughly as any statesman of that time, and felt its seriousness as keenly. His great heart made him hate slavery. The abounding kindness of his whole nature protested against its injustice. From his earliest boyhood, to see others, even dumb animals, in pain cut him to the quick. At his first school his anger was aroused by seeing some boys put a live coal upon a wood turtle's back, and one of the first bits of prose he ever wrote was a protest against cruelty to animals. Years later, when he had grown to manhood, Lawyer Lincoln, riding the Eighth Circuit, jumped from his buggy, and hazarded his dignity and his clothes by wading waist-deep into the mire to save a struggling pig. As a captain in the Black Hawk War, he risked his life by protecting an old Indian from rough and angry soldiers who thought they had captured a spy. To such a man, the strongest element in whose strong nature was kindness, slavery with its cruelties was

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revolting. On a trip to New Orleans when he was twenty-one he saw a slave auction. The scene filled him with an unconquerable hate. "Boys, let's get away from this," he said. "If I ever get a chance to hit that thing, I'll hit it hard."

While in the State Legislature, when abolition was extremely unpopular in Illinois, in 1837, only one year before Lovejoy was murdered at Alton, Lincoln against overwhelming odds, entered a protest "declaring the institution of slavery to be founded on both injustice and bad policy."

With him slavery was not merely a party issue; it was a great moral question. Unlike Douglas he cared much whether it was voted up or voted down. His cause was hearted. Nothing had ever aroused him like this. In other questions, the tariff, finance, internal improvements, he took but a perfunctory interest. But when the Missouri Compromise was repealed and the Kansas-Nebraska Bill with its squatter sovereignty doctrine became a law, his moral nature was stirred to its depths. He plunged heart and soul "into an arduous study of all the legal, historical, and moral aspects" of the slavery question.¹ He brooded over them day and night. To what good effect his debates with Douglas showed.

But though Lincoln hated the institution of slavery as much as did the New England Abolitionists, he understood other sections of the country far better than did they; for he was an Illinoisan, and Illinois in 1850 was a miniature Union. Because of its peculiar location,

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the East and the West, the North and the South, Cavalier and Puritan, within its borders met and mingled. From this vantage ground Lincoln was able to comprehend the views of all. For this and other reasons he has been called by poet and historian "the First American." Mr. Woodrow Wilson in his "Calendar of Great Americans" tells us, in substance, that Hamilton and Madison were great Englishmen bred in America, that John Adams and Calhoun were great provincials, that "Jefferson was not a thorough American because of the strain of French philosophy that permeated and weakened all his thought," that "Jackson was altogether of the West" — "a frontier statesman" — and having no social imagination, "no unfamiliar community made any impression on him," that in Henry Clay "East and West were mixed without being fused," but in Lincoln all "elements were combined and harmonized." "He was," says Mr. Wilson, "the supreme American in history. As he stands there in his complete manhood at the most perilous helm in Christendom, what a marvelous composite figure he is! The whole country is summed up in him."

Lincoln was first of all a Westerner, the child of the pioneer, rejoicing in physical strength, smacking ever of the rough life of the men who cut down the forest and won the West; of those men who had forgotten the ways of the seacoast or of the Old World, if they had ever known them; from whom all artificial social distinctions had been stripped; outdoor, sinewy men of oak, in moccasins, buckskin breeches and coonskin

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caps, keen of eye and lithe of limb, "embrowned in the sun, hardened in manner by a coarse life of change and danger."¹ And from Lincoln this strain of coarseness that came from his contact with the raw and elemental was never entirely bred out. It appeared in the pungent joke, the racy story, in his rude manners, his unkempt dress, and his disregard of conventionality.

Neither did he ever lose the strength and independence which this rough western life gave him, the habit of looking at things in the rough and the real, with the husks of artificiality stripped off. It was thus, unabashed and unafraid, he dealt with great matters and great men.

"The color of the ground was in him, the red Earth,
The tang and odor of the primal things,
The rectitude and patience of the rocks;
The gladness of the wind that shakes the corn;
The courage of the bird that dares the sea;
The justice of the rain that loves all leaves;
The pity of the snow that hides all scars."²

And being a Westerner, Mr. Lincoln understood as no New Englander or Virginian could understand, the hopes and possibilities of the West, its significance in the nation's life. It has always been hard for the East to comprehend the West. It is to-day and it was especially difficult before railroad and telegraph bound them together. The early Easterner often thought of the nation as simply the strip of states along the Atlantic and the Gulf. This was civilized America. Beyond the mountains was the wilderness, to be peopled

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by the rougher, less successful, and more adventurous of the seacoast folk. To understand that a great composite nation was to be cut out of the wilderness, a nation of which the Atlantic States were but the fringe, violated the Easterner's local prejudice if it did not exceed his imagination. But Westerners like Lincoln caught a vision of at least a dim outline of such a nation. And seeing this, they perceived the significance of the slave problem to the immigrant farmer and the son of the pioneer. Free soil, unencumbered by slave labor, was a necessity if the pioneer and his children were to come into their own, if the West was to realize its ambitions and live up to its possibilities. To the Westerner of the fifties the burning, paramount question was not concerning the existence of slavery in the South, but the extension of slavery into the new states and territories of the West. Shall the new lands be slave or free? That was the question that occasioned the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and precipitated the Civil War, and that was the question about which Lincoln had thought more profoundly than almost any other statesman of his day.

But not only did Lincoln hate slavery with all the intensity of a New England Abolitionist, not only did he know the West and sympathize with its ambitions, he also knew the South — its tone and temper and rights. From early boyhood he had rubbed elbows with pro-slavery men. With them, through the long range of the Eighth Circuit, for twenty-five years he had discussed the question in the grocery store and the village tavern.

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His wife was an aristocratic Kentuckian, and his closest friend, Joshua Speed, was a slaveholder. Lincoln knew the slaveholders' point of view. He knew that they were not all the brutal men whom the North had painted, that many of them were kind masters, chivalrous gentlemen, who thought that slavery was right and just, even humane, and who sincerely believed that, in maintaining their right to secede, they were withstanding invasion as gallantly as did their Revolutionary fathers.

And while he could not sympathize with this point of view, he at the same time recognized that the South did have rights. He knew that slavery was protected by the Constitution. He knew that slaves were, in a sense, property; and loving law as thoroughly as an Easterner, surely upon his accession to the presidency, he had no thought of setting free the southern slave, of taking any man's property from him, without recompense. It was because he understood the South so well that he later suggested again and again to his Cabinet and to Congress that the South be recompensed for slaves set free. He surely was a friend of the South as well as of the North, indeed the South's best friend, many Southerners say to-day, although then they did not realize it.

But when Lincoln came to the presidency, the question that confronted the nation was not the existence of slavery in the South or the extension of slavery in the West but the greater question growing out of these, the existence of the Union, the right of States to secede.

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Upon this question Lincoln stood firm as a rock. From beginning to end he was a Unionist. There was never a bit of wavering. Lincoln was a lover of law. He revered the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. Upon these he had meditated day and night. The Constitution he knew was a sacred compact not to be broken. He believed this as firmly as did Webster, whose speech in reply to Hayne he placed at the acme of American Oratory. As fervently as did Webster he had prayed that his eyes might never look upon States "dissevered, discordant, belligerent." This supreme desire he later emphatically expressed in his now famous letter to Horace Greeley: "I would save the Union. I would save it in the shortest way under the Constitution. My paramount object is to save the Union, and not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I have here stated my purpose according to my views of official duty, and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free."

It is for these reasons that I think Abraham Lincoln comprehended the problem of slavery and the Union as a national problem, and understood its significance

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for all sections of the country, and felt its seriousness, as thoroughly as any statesman of his time.

Mr. Lincoln also had an instinct for leadership. As Mr. Rothschild has well shown in his admirable biography, he was by nature a master of men. I do not mean that he was a man of blood and iron who by sheer strength beat down all opposition to his desires and purposes, and with an iron hand compelled others to obey him. He ruled by subtler means. He won the hearts of men by those forces which we include under the vague phrase "personal magnetism."

"Chosen for large designs, he had the art
Of winning with his humor, and he went
Straight to his mark, which was the human heart."

Even those who obeyed him could not always tell why they did so. Men would go to him as enraged enemies and come away loyal friends. Sometimes his humor or tact robbed them of suspicion. But often it was the clearness of his reasoning and his speech, his absolute simplicity and frankness and sincerity that aroused their enthusiasm and won their affections. "A complete man," says Emerson in his essay on *Behavior*, "should need no auxiliaries to his personal presence. Whoever looked on him should consent to his will, being certified that his aims were generous and universal. The reason why men do not obey us is because they see the mud at the bottom of our eye." Men looked into Lincoln's eye; they saw no mud; and they obeyed him. His strength was "as the strength of ten" because his heart was pure.

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When he went to Washington as President, how he amazed the politicians! At first his directness and patience, his candor and modesty, his rough humor and unconventionality, were so misunderstood that even some of his cabinet mistook them for clownishness, vacillation, or stupidity. But it did not take some of them long to learn who was to be master. They found before many weeks that they were dealing with a shrewd and honest intellect, a firm will, and a large heart. Perhaps nowhere were these powers more clearly shown than in the handling of his mistrustful and factious cabinet, made up of old-time Democrats and old-time Whigs and new-time Republicans, the strongest, most influential men that he could muster, his "happy family," as he used to call them.

Secretary Seward, the able and experienced statesman from the Empire State, was the first to learn his lesson. Mistaking Lincoln's simplicity for incompetence, he essayed to manage the administration. He revised the President's *First Inaugural* with a ready hand. At the close of the first month he presented to the President a most extraordinary paper entitled "Some Thoughts for the President's Consideration," in which he said, in terms not over-diplomatic, that so far the administration was "without a policy either foreign or domestic." It must pursue at once a novel and aggressive policy, changing "the question before the public from one upon slavery or about slavery for a question upon union or disunion. It must demand explanations from France and Spain,

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categorically, at once ;” and if satisfactory explanations “were not received, declare war against them. It must be somebody’s business to pursue and direct this policy incessantly.” And he closed with the suggestive remark, “It is not my especial province, but I neither seek to evade nor assume responsibility.”¹ This, as an English biographer aptly puts it, was like saying to Mr. Lincoln : “You are doing as well as one could expect, under your difficult circumstances ; but this, my dear fellow, is a great crisis in our history. We need a *man*. Do you not think you had better ask *me* to help you, and to step into your place in order to transact this business?”²

It was in his reply to this insult that Lincoln showed his instinct for leadership. He did not ask for Mr. Seward’s resignation, as weaker men would have done ; he did not make public this marvelous memorandum, as more impetuous presidents would have done ; but to his Secretary of State, who had thus placed himself at the President’s mercy, he replied magnanimously and firmly, that already his policy had been clearly outlined in his inaugural, he saw no reason for changing it, and if any policy was to be pursued, he as President must do it. He then put away the “Thoughts” among his private papers. The incident was closed. Nothing was heard of it by any one for a quarter of a century.

It was an inexplicable thing for an able statesman like Mr. Seward to do but it revealed to him unmistakably the man with whom he was dealing, and from that time, be it said to his praise, he was the President’s

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devoted subordinate. A few weeks later he wrote to his wife: "Executive skill and vigor are rare qualities. The President is the best of us." ¹

The Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, was one of the strongest men in Lincoln's cabinet. Imposing in physique and presence, eloquent, energetic, and able, experienced as a Governor and a Senator, he came to the cabinet with a prestige that gave authority to his word. With a confident willingness did the President turn over to him the exclusive management of the Government's treasury; for, although scrupulously honest about paying his debts, Lincoln was a poor financier. "Wealth," he once said, "is simply a superfluity of what we don't need." And he governed himself accordingly. He had borrowed money to buy some "store clothes" and pay his initial expenses at Vandalia the first time he went to the State Legislature, and he borrowed money to pay the expenses of his inauguration journey to Washington. "Money," said he, when committees came to consult him on important financial questions, "I don't know anything about money! I never had enough of my own to fret me. Go to Secretary Chase; he is managing the finances." And Mr. Chase undoubtedly did his task well, although it was an extremely difficult one in those war times; for, as Mr. Chase said, "the spigot in Uncle Abe's barrel" was "twice as big as the bung-hole." So well, indeed, did he do his work that he got into that most dangerous of all attitudes; he looked upon himself as an indispensable man. Unfor-

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tunately Mr. Chase had an overleaping ambition. The presidential bee buzzed in his bonnet and buzzed so loud that often he could not hear the voice of his chief. Mr. Lincoln at first closed his eyes to these shortcomings and when a friend told him of Mr. Chase's disloyalty, he turned him off with : "That reminds me of a story : "

"You were brought up on a farm, were you not? Then you know what a 'chin fly' is. My brother and I were once plowing corn on a Kentucky farm, I driving the horse, and he holding the plow. The horse was lazy ; but on one occasion rushed across the field so that I, with my long legs, could scarcely keep pace with him. On reaching the end of the furrow, I found an enormous 'chin fly' fastened upon him, and I knocked it off. My brother asked me what I did that for. I told him I didn't want the old horse bitten in that way. 'Why,' said my brother, 'that's all that made him go!' Now, if Mr. Chase has a presidential 'chin fly' biting him, I'm not going to knock him off, if it will only make his department *go*."

After a while, however, so maddening was the sting that the public weal demanded that Mr. Lincoln knock off the "chin fly." And the patience, magnanimity, and political sagacity with which he did this would alone mark him as a masterful leader.

But Mr. Lincoln's supreme accomplishment in the mastery of a strong nature, in changing disgust and hatred to esteem and good will, was the control of his leonine Secretary of War, Mr. Stanton. Mr. Lincoln's

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first meeting with his future Secretary was not prophetic of good fellowship. They were associate counsel in a famous law case in Cincinnati. Although at that time Lincoln had a high standing as a lawyer in his own State, he was not well known outside of it, and Mr. Stanton was inclined to deride his unkempt appearance. Indeed, Mr. Lincoln heard him inquire, "Where did that long-armed creature come from, and what can he expect to do in this case?"¹ Years later, when Mr. Lincoln became President, Mr. Stanton, retiring from Buchanan's cabinet, resumed the practice of law in Washington, and his criticism of Mr. Lincoln was caustic and unceasing. He accused the administration of imbecility and dishonesty. He called the President "a low, cunning clown," "the original gorilla," and "often said that DuChaillu was a fool to wander all the way to Africa in search of what he already could have found in Springfield, Illinois."² But in 1862 Mr. Lincoln saw in Mr. Stanton a forceful, determined, tireless patriot, whose services the country needed, and casting to the winds all personal animosity, he asked him to become a member of his official family. It would breed dissension in the cabinet, many thought, and some remonstrated with the President; but he, as usual, had a story at his tongue's end.

"We may have to treat him," he said, "as they are sometimes obliged to treat a Methodist minister out West. He gets wrought up to so high a pitch of excitement in his prayers and exhortations that they are obliged to put bricks in his pockets to keep him down.

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We may be obliged to treat Stanton the same way but I guess we'll let him jump a while first." ¹

Mr. Stanton at times surely did jump; he objected, expostulated, fumed, and roared. But with masterful skill the President, when necessary, put the bricks into his pockets; or, to change the figure, "ploughed around Mars," as he called his War Secretary. Now it was a tactfully worded request; now it was a patient waiting; again it was a generous concession or a humble remonstrance; but sometimes it was a firm command: "Let this be done at once. A. L." And then the order was obeyed. There were sides of the President's character, his humor for example, which the Secretary of War could never have understood had they lived together a thousand years, but without doubt Mr. Stanton spoke sincerely when, standing in the presence of death, he said: "There lies the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen." ²

It was thus with sagacity, humor, patience, firmness and sincerity that Lincoln mastered great men. Not less was his instinct for leadership seen in his dealings with common folk. He has been called the Great Commoner. To him it was a title of nobility; for he loved the plain people. No man knew them better than he; he was born among them and bred among them, indeed was ever of them, a "common man—with genius." He had eaten their food, sat by their firesides, rocked their cradles, dug in their fields, argued in their grocery stores, watched by their sick, and buried their dead; he knew their ways of living, their

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methods of reasoning, their vernacular, their superstitions and bigotry and petty meannesses, their rough strength, their common sense, their pleasures and wishes and sorrows. With marvelous accuracy he foresaw their conclusions and heard their voice from afar. And withal he believed in them and they in him. To them President Lincoln was ever a friend at court. No bar of official pride or circumstance kept them from him. He was always accessible, ready to hear their complaints, and sympathize with their bereavements. To the common soldier he was always Father Abraham; to the common citizen, Honest Abe Lincoln. To him they were not subjects but friends. They might sometimes be moved by passion and misled by error but their hearts were right. To "this great tribunal of the American people" he was always ready to trust his cause. "You" could "fool all of them some of the time, and some of them all of the time, but you" couldn't "fool all of them all of the time."¹ In "the ultimate justice of the people" he trusted. "Is there," said he, "any better or equal hope in the world?"²

"How beautiful to see
Once more a shepherd of mankind indeed,
Who loved his charge.
His was no lonely mountain peak of mind,
Thrusting to thin air o'er our cloudy bars,
A sea-mark now, now lost in vapors blind;
Broad prairie rather, genial, level-lined,
Fruitful and friendly for all human kind,
Yet also nigh to heaven and loved of loftiest stars."³

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A powerful auxiliary to Lincoln's successful leadership was the mastery of a clear and noble prose style. With less than one year of school training, untaught in rhetoric, with no knowledge of any foreign language and but scant acquaintance with the English classics, he used language so direct and incisive, so idiomatic and so chaste, fitting so closely to the thought, so well adapted to the occasion, with such perfect restraint and noble tone, that to-day English classes at Harvard and Bowdoin and many other colleges are studying his letters and speeches, and in this and other lands his messages are regarded as models of State papers. Last year I heard a college president, whose literary judgment is highly valued, say that a more fittingly expressed letter was never written than Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby. A copy of this letter hangs on the wall in Brasenose College, Oxford University, England, as a model of pure and exquisite diction which has never been excelled. How could a nation's gratitude to a mourning mother be better expressed than in these words?

EXECUTIVE MANSION,

WASHINGTON, NOV. 21, 1864.

TO MRS. BIXBY, BOSTON, MASS.

Dear Madam:—I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain

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from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

A. LINCOLN.¹

Lincoln's *Gettysburg Speech* so good an authority as Emerson has characterized as one of the two greatest orations in American literature. It will surely live as long as English letters survive. It is the sublimely expressed thought of a great man on a great occasion.

Still better, some good judges think, is the *Second Inaugural*. "It is like a sacred poem," says Carl Schurz, a critic not likely to exaggerate. "No American President had ever spoken words like these to the American people. America never [before] had a President who found such words in the depths of his heart."

Where did Lincoln get his prose style? He got it in his clear, logical intellect that pierced to the very core of things. And he found his noblest words in the depths of his great heart. That is the source of the genuineness with which his words ring and of the deep moral tone that resounds through his best prose and makes it great. "The style is the man." Lincoln wrote thus because he was Lincoln.

Lincoln was a master of men. He was that and more: he was master of a noble English prose style.

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Yes, he was more than that : he was master of himself. " He that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city. " Amid all the harrowing perplexities of his administration, amid home sorrows that cut deep into his soul, amid all the malicious, virulent attacks of his enemies and the treachery of those who professed to be his friends, he kept his spirit sweet and his heart free from bitterness and guile. In a whirlwind he stood self-poised, keeping the little things small and the big things great, not allowing convention or custom to rob him of his honesty or independence, not allowing the restraints of office, the cruelties of war, or the meannesses of others, to sour his humor, kill his kindness, or rob him of his humanity.

And, world-old paradox, he was master of himself because he recognized that he was not his own master. Whatever our theological beliefs may be, like it or not, no one of us can study thoroughly the life of this great man without being deeply impressed that more and more, as those dark days went by, his consciousness increased that he was but an instrument in the hands of God to do His will.

In the battle for human liberty in the American Republic a great crisis came, and in the fullness of time there was a man to meet it.

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